

Local Governance

Guided by administrative policies and systems inherited from the former communist regime, Bulgaria's local level democracy is working to carve out a niche within the new political order. Local governments are seeking to gain control over their administrative and fiscal destiny, to equip themselves to make responsible choices about their future, and to act on these choices effectively and accountably. Central to these aspirations is the issue that local institutions are poorly equipped and lack the authority to discharge their responsibilities and have few opportunities to establish the tools to create a sound municipal finance base in support of local infrastructure development and provision of services. USAID works with local governments to become more efficient, to improve local services, and to lobby more effectively for their interests at the national level.

Local Government Initiative

Approach:

- Promote the adoption of a favorable legal framework conducive to fiscal decentralization
- Establish financial tools, resources and practices for the creation of a sound municipal finance base
- Develop more efficient and participatory local administrations
- Create mechanisms for citizen participation in local government decision-making

Developing the Authority and Capacity for Democratic, Decentralized Local Administration

USAID launched the Local Government Initiative (LGI) Program in 1995 to help local governments implement democratic reform,

promote decentralization, improve intergovernmental relations, and reinforce the principle of local self-government. Since then, USAID has sought to sustain local government reform through consecutive phases of assistance, including targeted training and technical assistance in public policy reform, municipal property management, municipal finance, and organizational development. This year, USAID started the next phase of the Local Government Initiative, shifting the focus from primarily working at the local level to partnering with national government institutions to promote policies aimed at optimum level of fiscal decentralization. This will be carried out by targeted training and technical assistance to the Ministry of Finance, as well as by promoting and facilitating local-national dialogue on the issues of decentralization. Coupled with the clarification of roles and responsibilities among different levels of government, the fiscal decentralization program will enable local governments to marshal sufficient financial resources to carry out their mandatory responsibilities and deliver adequate public services. Other key objectives of LGI III are to develop a sound municipal finance base and credit market; institutionalize citizen participation at all levels of government; and develop more efficient mechanisms for training municipalities in the areas of public finance and public administration.

USAID FACTS:

- 18 local government-related training modules have been created
- 70 Bulgarian municipalities trained in and applying modern budgeting practices
- 1,534 participants from 184 municipalities attended municipal management related workshops
- 50% of municipalities exposed to a new solid waste fee-setting methodology



USAID/Bulgaria
Partners in Transition

Assistance to Local Government Support Organizations

Approach:

- Build the capacity of municipal associations to lobby at the national government level and advocate for policy reforms in support of local self-government
- Strengthen the capacity of local government support organizations
- Promote democracy and democratic values within society by building and supporting non-governmental democratic structures

Local Government Support Organizations Development

Through its Direct Grants Program, USAID seeks to empower local non-governmental organizations to help municipal administrations acquire new skills and influence the policy environment.

USAID FACTS:

- The National Association of Municipalities now unites and is the statutory voice of all the 262 Bulgarian municipalities
- 16 Bulgarian NGOs are now independently conducting local government-related training to develop the tools and expertise for more competent local governance and effective advocacy
- 2,000 municipal employees took NGO-provided training in the areas of strategic planning, municipal property management, public procurement and customer service
- 9 regional associations of municipalities provide technical assistance to 150 municipalities;
- 4 municipal customer-service and information centers are fully operational and provide essential municipal services as "one-stop shops"

The National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria has established itself as the major network of municipal associations and the primary voice to lobby central government. In addition, the USAID-supported Foundation for Local Government Reform has become an important local government reform advocate and powerful

think-tank promoting policy reform and public private partnership. USAID has also provided assistance to five regional municipal associations in building their advocacy skills and ability to assist the local administration.

Technical Twinning Program

Approach:

- Promote best practices in local self-government and support twinning partnerships between Bulgarian and American municipalities
- Establish public-private partnerships to meet critical municipal development needs
- Offer opportunities for initiatives in local economic development

Promoting Cross-Border Partnerships

The program for technical twinning between Bulgarian and American cities provides for an exchange of experience, know-how, and successful practices between Bulgarian and American partners in different areas of self-government, including local economic development, municipal property management, and urban development. So far, eleven Bulgarian cities have implemented activities through this exchange of experience and expertise.

USAID FACTS:

- 11 Bulgarian cities have been successfully twinned with US cities
- 6 Bulgarian municipalities are developing municipal marketing strategies
- A new business incubator is being established in the town of Silistra
- 3 Bulgarian cities are developing strategies for establishing industrial parks

Integrated Community Level Support Program

Approach:

- Identify local players and build partnerships towards decentralized decision-making by integrating government, business and community participation in local economic development decisions

- Assess municipal economic strengths, opportunities and needs, and create a community spirit of renewal and hope
- Work through a community-based planning process that brings together a multi-sectoral working groups to develop and guide economic development projects

Advancing Community-Based Planning as a Model for Local Development

The Partners in Local Economic Development and Government Efficiency Program (PLEDGE) is implemented under an agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor to support local economic revival, promote enterprise competitiveness and generate jobs mostly in poor, underdeveloped municipalities with high level of unemployment. PLEDGE-supported projects expand community economic base by improving the utilization and allocation of available local resources, stimulating job creation and providing retraining to unemployed workers.

USAID FACTS:

- 35 municipalities are currently participating in the program
- 1,100 participants are involved in local economic development capacity building
- 152 jobs have been created for low skilled, unemployed, mostly Roma minorities